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This reluctance must be regarded as one of the main factors responsible for the growth of the institution of 'borrowing land', which we have described in the preceding chapter.

Sowing and Planting

The Nupe, possessing an elaborate calendar system which works with six seasons and twelve lunar months, have no difficulty in determining the coming of the rainy season. Besides, they regard the appearance (in April) of a small red insect, which is significantly called *gbama*, 'early rains', as a sign of the approaching rains. The first light showers, which as a rule are accompanied by thunderstorms, are ignored. After the first heavy rain, which may last for several hours or a whole night, has thoroughly softened the soil, village and town spring into activity. In the morning after the rain you will see the people wandering out to their fields. They walk in groups, neighbours or families together, fathers with their boys. Dogs trot behind their masters, and often a man or boy will lead a goat which will then feed on leaves and shrubs on the field. The men wear working dress: a loin-cloth and, if it is cold, a heavier cloth slung round the shoulders, and a straw hat as protection from the sun. They carry their hoe over the shoulder, and gourds with water, food and seeds, over the arm. In many parts farmers carry their bows and arrows with them when they go out to their fields as 'protection from wild beasts'—a habit which is dying out but slowly, although there is hardly any need for it to-day. I have never seen these weapons used.

The nature of the first farming activity depends on whether or not the farmer has done what 'good' farmers are expected to do, namely, planted his yams already in the rains, immediately after the harvest. If he has not done so he will now at once start preparing his yam field; if he has, he is free to turn his attention to the planting of bulrush-millet and maize. Of five farmers whose daily activities I was recording in Mokwa, three had planted yam in the rainy season and two (who both had to work single-handed) waited until the beginning of the new farming season. With the 'good' farmer, we will start with the planting of millet.

Again there are certain variations. Where millet and sorghum are planted as successive crops no hoeing or re-hoeing as a rule precedes the planting; as we shall see later the plots are normally prepared during the previous season. Where millet and sorghum are planted after other first-year crops or on a new plot, ridging, occupying the first few days of the new season, precedes the sowing. The technique of planting, moreover, varies slightly according to whether one plants on mounds or ridges, but is the same for both millet varieties and for sorghum. I will now describe the scene one will meet on the Nupe fields when planting is in progress. The farmer has divested himself of his superfluous clothing, his food and water gourds, and has placed his things out of the way, under a shady tree. Perhaps he has his small boys with him, whom he lets play by themselves in a corner of the field while he goes on with his work. Tied to his left arm the planter carries the seeds in a small

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gourd or his straw hat, keeping a ready supply in his left hand. In his right he carries the light hoe used for planting. With it he scratches the top or flank of the mound, while with his left, almost simultaneously, he throws the seeds into the newly made hole. The hole is then flattened out with the back of the hoe. Thus the farmer proceeds from mound to mound and row to row, working with amazing speed and ease: one man is able to sow about one acre in from five to six hours, with hardly any rest. This is the method used for sowing on mounds; sowing on ridges is even easier and quicker. No hoe is used, and the farmer can make use of both hands for the sowing, the seeds being pressed into the soft soil with the heel. The distance kept between two plants is a little over 2 feet. The sowing of one field with millet or sorghum is invariably done in a day or two, and is nearly always carried out single-handed. Where normally a larger group would be working together—brothers or a father and sons—the rest of the team would be occupied on another field, carrying out ridging, i.e. work for which co-operation is more urgently required. But when for one reason or another a farmer falls behindhand with his planting, ridging and sowing may have to be done at the same time. Once I saw a man and his two sons of 10 or 11 years carrying out this combined and hurried work: the boys were hoeing, preparing the ridges; the father followed in their tracks, sowing. After every ridge they had completed the boys waited for the man to catch up with the sowing. The ridges were crooked, irregular.

In these first days of the planting season the Nupe keep short days: they start comparatively late, about 8 a.m., and rarely return later than 2 or 3 o'clock. As the season wears on their working day extends. They start at daybreak and often do not return till 5 or 6 in the afternoon. They have their midday meal out on the farm, some bringing their own food, others having it brought out to them by their wives or daughters. At that time of the year, when fresh leaves and herbs are plentiful on the farms, the men rarely return home without a fair supply of various kinds: broad leaves which the Nupe women like for wrapping food in, or a special kind of aromatic leaf which the women use for their bath, or occasionally medicinal herbs used for various purposes. The men tie the leaves round their straw hats, and thus pleasantly and ornately attired wander home. A bath, a change of clothes, and afterwards the evening meal concludes their day.

To return to sowing. A day or two after bulrush-millet has been sown, maize is planted in very much the same fashion, again mostly in one day. Then one has to wait for another heavy rainfall before the next crops on the list, late millet and sorghum, can be sown. As a rule all four crops are sown within a week or ten days. These voluntary or involuntary waiting periods have their use: for often it becomes necessary to get one's tools repaired, perhaps a new blade fixed to the hoe, or to find new tools for the young boys who will, this year, join their fathers for the first time in the farm-work. By the time sorghum is planted the rains fall fairly regularly, and there is no need for further waiting.

The farmer turns directly to the planting of ground-nuts, which is reckoned to take from five to ten days. Ground-nuts must be planted on